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SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER BLAMES U.S., ISRAEL
FOR GAZA VIOLENCE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Palestinian Foreign Minister Ziad Abu-Amr, speaking June 13 at a press conference in Tokyo, blamed U.S. and Israeli policy for the violence now taking place in Gaza, asserting that the failure to deal with the Palestinian government has inevitably led to the current situation. Even if it can be said the U.S was "right" not to deal with the Hamas-led government, Abu-Amr said he can not understand why the U.S. and Israel are still rejecting the unity government in which Hamas has largely given up power and which has put forth a program that substantively complies with the Quartet's conditions for recognition. He also said that meetings between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert are going nowhere due to Israel's refusal to give Abbas anything, even on "minor" quality of life issues. Abu-Amr criticized the Israeli government for withholding tax revenues due to the Palestinians and said he is hopeful the new "Single Treasury Account" process - which he termed an American-imposed unnecessary detour - will lead to increased international funding for Palestinian institutions. When questioned about the failure of Palestinians to halt rocket attacks on Israel, he said he was opposed to such attacks but also asserted conditions caused by others have made it impossible for any authority to control what goes on in Gaza.
END SUMMARY.

VIOLENCE IN GAZA "NO SURPRISE"

¶2. (SBU) Palestinian Foreign Minister Ziad Abu-Amr, visiting Tokyo June 13, told an "on the record" gathering of reporters, businessmen, and diplomats attended by Embassy Tokyo political officer that the violence taking place in Gaza is "not a surprise to anyone" given the conditions in the territory caused by the failure of the United States and Israel to deal with the Palestinian Authority. "If you create the same conditions as are present in Gaza anywhere else you can count on an eruption of violence," he asserted. Abu-Amr said what looks from the outside like a power-struggle is really the result of underlying economic

and political conditions caused by the "siege" imposed on the Palestinians by policies driven by the United States and Israel. "If you put two brothers in a cage, then deprive them of the necessities of life, then of course they will turn on each other and fight."

U.S. WRONG NOT TO DEAL WITH PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT

¶13. (SBU) Abu-Amr stated that the approach the U.S. and Israel have taken to the Palestinians since the election that brought Hamas to power was wrong. The Palestinians, he said, were asked to hold a democratic election and did so, successfully. He recognizes that foreign powers are free to reject the results and choose not to deal with an elected government, but in this case the result has caused great harm to the overall peace process. He continued that even if for the sake of argument one was to agree it was right not to deal with the Hamas government, he can not understand the failure of the U.S. and Israel to recognize the recently formed National Unity Government.

¶14. (SBU) First, under the new government, Hamas agreed to give up the power it had won and share it with other factions and independents, giving up 24 cabinet seats in exchange for nine. Hamas agreed to give the Deputy Prime Ministership to their rival, Fatah, and also to give the three most important cabinet seats - Foreign Affairs, Finance, Interior - to independents. Fifteen other ministries were given to non-Hamas parties.

¶15. (SBU) Second, the program put forward by the unity government meets all the Quartet conditions, Abu-Amr asserted. He told the gathering the new program recognizes the right of Israel to exist, renounces violence, and accepts previous international agreements on the conflict, such as UNSCRs 242 and 338. In addition, he argued it gives President Abbas full authority to negotiate with the Israelis and contains an important article in which the Palestinian government agreed to honor previous agreements with Israel, including the Arafat-Rabin letters indicating mutual recognition and the Oslo Agreement, which specifically renounces violence and calls for a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the dispute. Accordingly, asserted Abu-Amr, the position put forth by the new unity government substantively meets all the conditions set forth by the Quartet. He believes the Quartet should have accepted this and, if still not completely satisfied, should have worked to narrow the differences. "Constructive engagement is required to synchronize our positions, but the U.S. Administration and Israel have rejected this, continued with their boycott, and have refused to recognize anything good. This is the reason for the decline in the situation in the Palestinian territories. They should have recognized us and worked with us to satisfy any further demands rather than pursuing a policy of 'blind restriction.'"

MEETINGS WITH ISRAEL GOING NOWHERE

¶16. (SBU) Abu-Amr stated that the three meetings the Secretary has helpfully arranged between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have gone nowhere because the Israelis refuse to give Abbas anything. This has embarrassed him before his people and undercut his authority, as the Palestinians question his ability to deliver on even "minor" quality of life issues. The failure of Israel to release tax revenues owed to the Palestinians is "unexplainable." If Israel were to give the Palestinians the \$50-60 million a month owed to them this would go a long way toward alleviating the violence and would also reduce the need for the Palestinians to ask for international support. Because of his inability to resolve any issues with the Israelis, Abbas has decided not to attend another meeting at this time. Abu-Amr said he is somewhat hopeful that perhaps a meeting will be held on June 26 in Sharm el-Sheikh at which Quartet representatives will

be present. He emphasized the participation of the EU and said "maybe the Quartet members can help break this deadlock and move things forward."

¶ 17. (SBU) Further on the access to funds, Abu-Amr responded to a question from a reporter about the establishment of the "Single Treasury Account" process, which he termed an unnecessary "detour" imposed by the United States. Nevertheless, he hopes it will allow international - mainly European - funds to go directly to the institutions that need them, rather than was the case under the "Temporary International Mechanism."

FAILURE TO CONTROL ATTACKS ON ISRAEL

¶ 18. (SBU) Several reporters asked Abu-Amr questions about why the Palestinians are unable to stop rocket attacks against Israel. He replied that he is totally opposed to such attacks and to all violence, but then sought to downplay them, asserting that half of the unguided rockets fall in Palestinian territories and that they have killed more Palestinians than Israelis. When pressed, he admitted that the conditions in Gaza make it impossible for anyone or any authority to exercise control, but then blamed this on external factors. He also asserted that Israel cannot expect the rockets to stop if they continue targeted killings, arrests, land confiscations, home demolitions, and other violent acts against the Palestinians. Abu-Amr concluded: "We must be brave and honest and say this must be stopped. Perhaps we have some responsibility, but we have been put in an untenable situation by others. It is not right to only blame the victims of siege, occupation, and poverty for this."

RELATIONS WITH JAPAN

¶ 19. (SBU) Abu-Amr commented very favorably on Japanese relations with the Palestinians. His remarks will be reported septel when we've received a more complete readout of his visit.

SCHIEFFER